Effects of diffuser airflow minima on occupant comfort, air mixing, and building energy use (RP-1515) - DTU Orbit (08/11/2017)

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There is great energy-saving potential in reducing variable air volume box minimum airflow set-points to about 10% of maximum. Typical savings are on the order of 10%-30% of total HVAC energy, remarkable for an inexpensive controls set-point change that properly maintains outside air ventilation. However, there has long been concern whether comfort and room air mixing are maintained under low flows through diffusers, and this concern has prompted variable air volume minima to be typically set at 20%-50% of maximum. RP 1515 evaluated occupants' thermal comfort and air quality satisfaction in operating buildings under both conventional and reduced minimum variable air volume flow set-points, and measured the air diffusion performance index and air change effectiveness for typical diffuser types in the laboratory. The hypotheses were that lowered flow operation would not significantly reduce comfort or air quality and that HVAC energy savings would be substantial. The hypotheses were almost entirely confirmed for both warm and cool seasons. But beyond this, the reduction of excess airflow during low-load periods caused occupants' cold discomfort in the warm season to be halved, a surprising improvement. It appears that today's widespread overcooling of buildings can be corrected without risk of discomfort by lowering conventional variable air volume minimum flow set-points.

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